

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 10, 2003

H.E. Tran Duc Luong
President
Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Office of the State
1 Bach Thao
Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam

H.E. Nong Duc Manh
General Secretary, Communist Party of Vietnam
Central Committee Headquarters
Nguyen Canh Chan
1A Hung Vuong
Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam

H.E. Phan Van Khai
Prime Minister
Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Office of the Prime Minister
Hoang Hoa Tham
Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam

H.E. Nguyen Van An
President of the National Assembly
Socialist Republic of Vietnam
National Assembly
35 Ngo Quyen
Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Dear Excellencies:

We wish to express our deep concern for the safety and potential arrest of the Most Venerable Thich Huyen Quang, Patriarch of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam and his deputy, Venerable Thich Quang Do. Media reports indicate that security police near Nha Trang detained a UBCV convoy carrying these two leaders on October 9, 2003, a day after a standoff outside Nguyen Thieu pagoda in Binh Dinh. Although recent reports suggest the standoff has abated, we understand that the Patriarch and his Deputy may once again be facing house arrest.

Just six months ago, your government released the Venerable Thich Huyen Quang after twenty years of house arrest. We are concerned that your government has not truly returned the Patriarch's freedom, but has instead continued to restrain his movement and activities. Similarly, Venerable Thich Quang Do was released from house arrest in late June only to be harassed and detained again as indicated by various international press agencies. Media reports also suggest that in this latest incident, the two monks were simply holding a meeting with other Buddhist clergy and laity, not committing a crime. As you may know, both of these men have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by U.S. Members of Congress and are widely respected for their compassion and dedication to the advancement of human freedom.

The apparent restrictions placed on the UBCV monks are unfortunate and heavy-handed actions in light of the reception Thich Huyen Quang was given in April 2003 by the Prime Minister Phan Van Kai. The Venerable Thich Huyen Quang has stated that at that time, the Prime Minister assured him that his detention and that of Thich Quang Do were mistakes made by local officials and would soon be rectified. Unfortunately, these promises appear to be unfulfilled. This latest incident again confirms the glaring lack of religious freedom in Vietnam.

We respectfully request that you halt the persecution of the UBCV and its leaders. By respecting the right of independent churches to practice their faith, you will not only enrich Vietnamese society, but also demonstrate that Vietnam is truly committed to improving its human rights record.

Sincerely,

Luella Sanchez
Chun Sun

Zoe Lahn
El Royce

Mike Honda

CC: The Honorable Raymond F. Burghardt
U.S. Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

H.E. Nguyen Tam Chien
Ambassador to the United States, Socialist Republic of Vietnam